

A NEW FACE OF TEACHING TECHNIQUE BY MAKING USE OF A POPULAR SOCIAL MEDIUM *FACEBOOK*: EFFECTIVE OR NOT?

Karunia Purna Kusciati, Ardianna Nuraeni
SebelasMaret University

Abstract: The new paradigm of teaching method gives a chance for teachers to look for unconventional teaching techniques to facilitate students' learning process. Facebook (FB), as one of popular social media in Indonesia, in fact, attracts four teachers of English Department of Sebelas Maret University to make use of its features for facilitating their students to experience a new learning process. This paper discusses the effectiveness of using Facebook for teaching and learning activity that covers a discussion about (1) FB features that are commonly used and the activities designed by the teachers, (2) the result dealing with to what extent the teaching and learning technique effective for the students, and (3) the factors influencing the effectiveness of such a learning technique. Collections of data were gained from the answer of the questionnaire given to 35 students and Focus Group Discussion. Content analysis and observation were carried on the students' activities in the virtual class. The findings show that FB feature *Groups* is often used by the teachers; with a *discussion* as the activity they conduct the most. The students found the teaching and learning activities on FB are effective seen from the aspects of accessibility and the degree of student engagement. Meanwhile, the ineffectiveness is only caused by two problems, i.e. technical problems and non-technical problems.

Keywords: *social networking, Facebook, online teaching and learning*

Introduction

Social network in the era of Web 2.0 is undoubtedly very familiar for modern people and the number of its users is significantly increasing from year to year. The data from the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology of Indonesia show that the number of internet users reached to 63 million people in October 2013 and 95% of those people accessed social network. The most popular social network accessed by Indonesian people is Facebook, making Indonesia as the fourth country in the world with the biggest number of its citizen using Facebook after USA, Brazil and India respectively.

The popularity of Facebook (FB) is seen as a chance for teachers to develop their teaching method because FB is usually the first social network people think of. Delmatoff (as cited in Kessler, 2009) who started a pilot social media program in her Portland, Oregon classroom is probably an example of teachers embracing internet at school rather than banning it. According to him, social media, like the Internet, will be a part of our world for a long time so it is better to teach it than to fight it. Blogs are popular among teachers since teachers have been using them to implement a blended learning method recently, but a social medium FB as a (supporting) teaching technique is still rarely used. In English Department of SebelasMaret University (UNS), for instance, there is only less than one fourth of the total number of the teachers making use of FB. In addition, there are only few articles discussing FB for teaching and learning and it is probably because educators have probably been reluctant to use social networking tools in the classroom, or to encourage students to participate in them (Ferdig, 2007; Green & Hannon, 2007 in Solomon & Schrum, 2010: p. 82).

By considering the new paradigm of teaching method of which students can experience a different learning atmosphere, collaborate and share information with their groups as well as control their literacy in modern technology development, this article presents the effectiveness of the use of FB for students' learning process.

Literature Review

Bryer and Zavatarro (as cited in Chen & Bryer, 2012) define social media as technologies that facilitate social interaction, make possible collaboration, and enable deliberation across stakeholders, and these technologies include blogs, wikis, media (audio, photo, video, text) sharing tools, networking platforms (including Facebook), and virtual worlds. One of websites many students and teachers usually firstly use to interact and to support their social life is Facebook, where comments and artifacts like photos, articles and links are often tagged/ shared. Those tags and shared materials can be used collaboratively to increase the development of knowledge of its users (read: teachers and students). For that reason, nowadays a number of teachers start making use of FB as a new tool to support their teaching technique. According to the research of Hardwood & Blackstone (2012), FB pages were introduced as a means of encouraging student interaction, further content exploration, and motivation for learning, in and out of the classroom. Kessler (2010) also states that using social media (FB) as a teaching tool has a natural collaborative element since students critique and

comment on each other's assignments, can easily access each other, and start a discussion with their teacher and peers. Collaborative learning, as the core of social learning, then becomes the basic principle of students' learning process of communicating with others to learn, develop, and expand all that they know; as well as to share ideas and information. According to Vygotsky (as cited in Chen & Bryer, 2012), when he talks about social learning, students can learn effectively by participating in collaborative problem-solving activities led by their teachers. He adds that when teachers help to facilitate students' interactions, the students have an authority to select what they need to learn to get a better understanding of the problem. Chen & Bryer (2012) report that some studies about collaborative learning has proven that such a learning is more effective than individualistic learning in "contributing to motivation, in raising achievement, and in producing positive social outcomes.

Research Questions

Based on the background above, this simple research tries to explain briefly dealing with a teaching and learning activity designed in FB, i.e. (1) FB features that are commonly used and the activities designed by the teachers, (2) the result dealing with to what extent the teaching and learning technique effective for the students, and (3) the factors influencing the effectiveness of such a learning technique. By underlining the idea of not eliminating a face-to-face studying process and of not making FB as a medium to use for the entire teaching and learning design, we observed four English Department UNS teachers' FB activities to answer the research questions.

Methodology

From 40 students given a questionnaire about learning designed in FB, there were only 35 students giving the questionnaires back to us. FGD was then conducted with 6 students to dig more thorough information of their experience and assessment towards FB. In addition, content analysis method was applied by observing the flow of the learning activities done in FB to observe the effectiveness of the virtual teaching and learning process.

Findings and Discussion

The data gathered from 35 questionnaires show that majority of respondents (26 respondents) have become the active users of FB for 3-5 years length, whereas the other 9 respondents have been active in using FB for even more than 5 years. It can be inferred that all of them are familiar with all FB features. According to 25 respondents, *groups* feature is mostly used for teaching and learning activity. Nuraeni, one of the teachers, who uses this feature, explains:

"I design my teaching and learning activities in *groups* because it can only be accessed by my own class, so the other friends in my FB won't be able to join in. It is important to make the teaching and learning activity become well-managed and run smoothly without any unnecessary "disturbance."

Groups feature indeed enables the account owner to set the group on default mode which means only the members of the group who can see the information shared or posted (Chai, 2010). Further, discussion becomes the activity done the most in *groups* feature, followed by material and assignment sharing. Nuraeni explains it as follows:

"I conduct the activity mostly in the form of discussion. I also share the materials and information for assignments and tests. It becomes easier since the groups feature now provide a *group chat* feature just like in chat application. The activity is quite the same as in the class discussion. Usually I post an article or give them the link of it to read and I ask them to comment on it, or I provide some questions for them to discuss. I only monitor their activity most of the time and add some important information or remind them of certain theories they might forget. I can check and monitor the students' active participation and comments easily only by reading theirs on the chat room."

Group chat enables every member of the group to have a chat at once which previously the member could only have it with one person at a time (Chai, 2010).

From Nuraeni's explanation above, it can be seen that the teaching and learning activity of discussion done in FB supports the idea of students-centered learning in which the students are asked to participate actively in teaching and learning process, whereas the teachers only play a role as the supervisors. In other words, the teachers function as a facilitator. The activity helps the students to develop their own thinking by trying to solve the problems not only by themselves but also by working with the other students or friends. By having discussion they share ideas of how to get the best or right answer as the final conclusion of their discussion.



The student interaction in the discussion shows how social learning in the form of collaborative learning is applied in the teaching and learning process (See the picture above). As Chen and Bryer argue that “Collaboration is the most important characteristic of social learning. While instructors help to facilitate group interactions, students have the autonomy to self-select what they need to learn to gain a better understanding of the problem.” (Chen & Bryer, 2012). By the help of FB, the social learning with its collaborative learning is possible to conduct since it enables both the students and teachers to be interconnected by sharing and exchanging thought, information, materials, or knowledge. FB belongs to one of the types of web 2.0 in which the characteristics of it are “user generated content, participatory culture,

and open sourcing as it moves toward interactive, decentralized, and multi-media models” (Maness in Beer, 2008, p. 227). In other words, the learning activity on FB becomes a collective activity, not individual one, since it involves participatory culture.

Another finding shows that 30 respondents say that the teaching and learning activity on FB is fun and easy. Ryan, one of the respondents, says:

“It’s a cool way to study. By making use of FB, my teachers are so updated. They try to approach us and get connected with us with FB. I think it’s because they know that we’re always on line and access FB most of the time.”

Najib also shares his fun experience of his learning activity using FB:

“It’s fun! Last semester I followed the discussion on Reading class conducted on FB. I tried to give comments but I didn’t get any responses and somehow it challenged me, so I kept giving my comments. Finally, I succeeded but I didn’t realize that the time was over. The result was I was late coming to the next class.”

Further, Hana says:

“It’s great! We can do it [teaching and learning activity] anywhere without necessarily be there on campus. Besides, I can also do something else while I join the class.”

The explanations show that the students enjoy and feel relax following the learning activity on FB because they can always log on it whenever they get an internet connection. It means that FB has become a part of their daily life that cannot be separated from them. They do not feel tense as what they feel in class situation when they have to face the teachers directly. This feeling of informality, apparently, proves that they enjoy the activity. As Chen and Bryer (2012) argue that “As students progress from high school to college and graduate schools, the role of informal learning becomes more and more important because learning can happen anywhere at any time.” While, in a formal learning situation (in the classroom) they sometimes feel uncomfortable and tense when they are asked by the teachers directly and FB can somehow help them in solving the problem. Tiffany explains it as follows:

“I think FB can help some students who feel shy and find it difficult to express their ideas, comments, or opinion orally. They are usually not active in class discussion and they feel more comfortable deliver it in the written form. And that’s what we do when we have a discussion on FB. We write our comments, not speak it up.”

What Tiffany explains is similar to the idea of Salwa, another teacher handling Reading and Listening classes on FB. According to Salwa, the discussion can facilitate those who are passive and shy in class to get actively involved. An interesting argument about the “flexibility” of FB is given by Nia. She says:

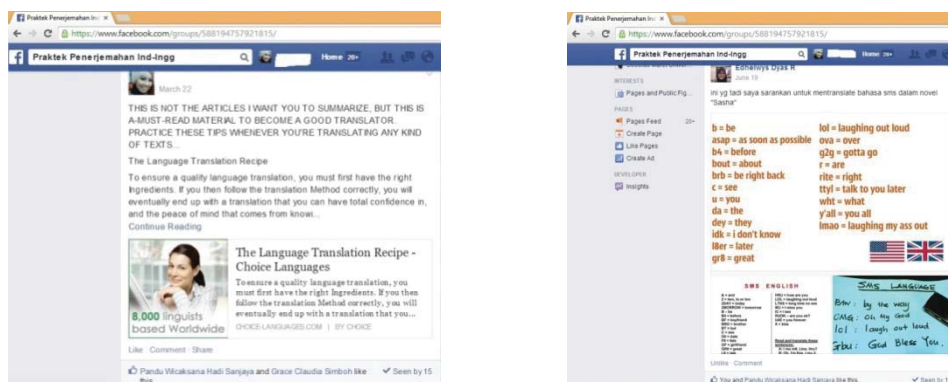
“The teaching and learning activity on FB can replace or substitute the class activity in the case when the teachers can’t teach since she/he has other things to do. And for me it doesn’t matter. I’m okay with that.”

Nia’s argument is in line with Nuraeni’s reason in using FB.

“It is for substituting the meeting in classes when I’m away because of other duties that force me not to be able to stand in front of the class. Therefore, I still can conduct the teaching and learning activities by having the “on-line” class.”

It shows the online class can be conducted at any time – may not be conducted according to the scheduled course – because it has the main purpose of only substituting the real in-class activity when the teachers are away.

In short, teaching and learning on FB is considered effective by the students. The effectiveness is mostly seen from the aspects of accessibility and the degree of student participation. Easiness in accessing the online class becomes their main reason of saying that learning on FB is effective, even with only a mobile phone on hand. FB has a feature *notification* functioning like a bell that allows the students to immediately join the class. In addition, the easy access to get various learning materials and wider online references makes the teaching and learning effective, too (See the two pictures below).



Dealing with the degree of student engagement, the majority of them state that such a learning design gives them a bigger chance to involve actively in the activities conducted by their teachers. Students argue that there is no time limitation to deliver their idea since they can think longer of what they are going to say in a more relaxed situation before posting it. This is in line with McDonald's statement (2013), saying that students automatically consider FB to be a non-judgemental environment since they were more prepared to express their opinions. Students also admit that they can abandon their fear, and also their nervous, awkward feeling when posting arguments in FB discussion. In other words, online discussion conducted in FB is proven raising the higher number of students' engagement.

From the discussion above, it is clear that students give a positive attitude towards teaching and learning on FB, however, they still face problems making the teaching and learning ineffective, i.e. technical factor and non-technical factor.

The first factor, the technical factor, relates to the availability of the internet connection. Those who live in a remote area usually find themselves difficult to get (strong) internet access and this problem sometimes obligates them to go to an internet cafe nearby to be able to join the class, to take part in discussions or to download materials. For some effortless students, such a problem makes them unhappy and leads them to decide to withdraw from the class activities. According to students belonging to a Listening Class, Hanna, she was ever given a task to upload a video and she could not do it due to a bad internet signal or even no internet access. She and her friends also had a problem with the maximum capacity available for uploading a video. Finally, they only posted the web address where they took the video from. The other two technical problems found are the inappropriate time when students give comments at the same time and the unavailability of "font style" in FB such as Bold, Italic, Underline and "font color". It is found that when the students click the 'post' button at the same time, their postings are often identified having the same content with their friends' and this has a risk of being judged as a case of plagiarism by their teacher. Besides, the assessment as an active student with good quality content of posting is possibly reduced. The text distinguisher facility, font style and font color, is considered very important too, especially for those who need to provide supporting web references. As we know, when we find a link shared by others in FB we will automatically read the whole part (read: paragraph) of the link content. This wastes students' time since they cannot directly go to the highlighted part(s). We can imagine how many minutes a student has to spend to read, for example, three links containing a long article before s/he can post his/her own argument. Such a problem often happens to students of Translation Class since they are demanded to employ reasons and arguments towards their translation decision making process and to prove their consideration of choosing particular dictions or sentences by presenting the sources/ references. In fact, posts with relevant links, images and other media are valid and potentially more useful to the collaborative learning experience (McDonald, 2013).

The non-technical problem covers two aspects, i.e. the teacher aspect and the student aspect. When arranging an activity of online discussion, teachers have roles to provide student motivation, guide collaboration, and navigate discussion away from tangents (McDonald, 2013). The finding shows that teachers sometimes do not guide their students intensively as they should be, but they only read their students' arguments without giving any feedbacks. This absolutely leads to an ineffective discussion, with students' thought of having no idea whether they are in the right track or not. As a consequence, the discussion goes to the wrong direction with no

valuable essence to learn. Finally, the student aspect making the learning in FB ineffective is caused by those who tend to dominate their classmates in giving comments (opinions, arguments and answers), which discourages the others to express theirs. But, surprisingly, some students in FGD state that such a case is not seen as a problem since they are challenged to give comments more quickly and creatively. Thus, it can be concluded that the last point explained cannot actually be counted as 100% ineffective because it totally depends on the character of the students themselves.

Conclusion

From the findings above, it is obvious that learning on FB brings more benefits for students than the negatives. Thus, it can be concluded that such a learning design is effective. Although learning on FB makes them happy, students, in fact, still prefer a face-to-face interaction to a virtual interaction. This new creative teaching technique is viewed only better to substitute class meetings when teachers are absent, with maximum 4 meetings out of 16 class meetings.

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